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## Rijksmuseum's Vermeer Show to Include Recently Disputed Work

The museum will present "Girl With a Flute" as a Vermeer work in an exhibition next year despite a contrary finding by the National Gallery of Art, which owns the painting.

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"Girl With a Flute" will be displayed at the Rijksmuseum as an authentic Vermeer. The National Gallery of Art recently determined it had actually been painted by an associate of the Dutch artist. via National Gallery of Art, Washington

By **Graham Bowley**

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The [Rijksmuseum](#) in Amsterdam announced on Tuesday that among the treasured works to be featured in its expansive exhibition on Johannes Vermeer next year would be a painting, "Girl With a Flute," that has for years been embraced as one of the rare surviving works by a painter considered one of history's finest.

But the inclusion has stirred up a bit of a debate because the museum that is loaning the work, the [National Gallery of Art](#) in Washington, announced last month that after long and careful scientific and artistic study, it had decided the painting [was not, in truth, by Vermeer](#).

Instead, its curators, conservators and scientists [concluded that the work](#) was most likely created by a studio associate of Vermeer — a pupil or apprentice, even a member of his family, but not the great artist himself. It lacked the precision for which the 17th-century Dutch artist is famous, it said. The brushwork was ["awkward."](#)

And so, as the art world looks forward to an exhibition being billed as the largest exhibit ever of Vermeer's work — 28 paintings in one place — it will also enjoy one of the discipline's great pastimes: a scuffle over attribution.

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"We tend to have a more inclusive view of Vermeer's oeuvre," Taco Dibbits, the Rijksmuseum's general director, said in an interview. "We feel it should stay included in the oeuvre of Vermeer and they feel it should not."

There are only about three dozen known Vermeer paintings, and for years there had been questions about the attribution for "Girl With a Flute." It was smaller than most of his other works, and, unusual for the artist's oeuvre, painted on a wooden panel instead of canvas.

The National Gallery of Art said that microscopic pigment analysis and advanced imaging had shown the work's pigments to be coarsely ground, creating an almost granular surface, whereas Vermeer typically ground the pigments he used coarsely for the underpaint but finely for the final layers.

The findings, the gallery emphasized, underpinned a new way of looking at Vermeer — not as "a lone genius," it said, but "an instructor or mentor to the next generation of artists." On its [website](#), the museum now attributes the painting to "Studio of Johannes Vermeer."

Dibbits, whose Vermeer exhibition will be bolstered by loans of works from the United States, Europe and Japan, said there had been questions raised about the authenticity of other Vermeers that will be included in the show.

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He said his museum's analysis of Vermeer's broad range of works shows that he was an artist who experimented and took different artistic routes in his career.

While the National Gallery emphasizes "more of a view that the artist follows a line in his development" and considered this work too much of an outlier, he said the Rijksmuseum believes that Vermeer, who died in 1675 at age 43, was capable of producing this kind of work, even if it possesses some different characteristics than the rest of his output.

"We feel the more we now research the more variable he is as an artist, and we feel we can't exclude it from the oeuvre," he said. "We feel he is capable of doing this as well."

Furthermore, he said, "There is no written evidence or other sources that suggest a workshop."

The National Gallery of Art, which is sending three other Vermeers to Amsterdam for the show, which opens in February, said it remained confident in its recently announced findings about "Girl With a Flute."

Its decision to reattribute the painting was "the result of years of close study, conversation and consideration between a team of some of the leading experts in the field," the museum said in a statement.

"The authorship of the painting has long been a conversation among art historians — prior to being listed as 'attributed to' Vermeer, it was listed as 'circle of' Vermeer," the statement said. "In fact, the painting has not been listed as solely by Johannes Vermeer since it was first acquired in 1942 — only shortly after it was acquired was its attribution called into question."

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The reattribution by the National Gallery will be referred to the exhibition, Dibbits said. The catalog is still being written.

He also played down the idea that an attribution debate reflects any sort of major disagreement between the two museums. The line in this particular case is "paper-thin," Dibbits said, and he was open to changing his mind.

"It is something that is an evolving discussion," he said.

Graham Bowley is an investigative reporter on the Culture Dept. He also reported for The Times from Afghanistan in 2012. He is the author of the book "No Way Down: Life and Death on K2." [@Graham Bowley](#) • [Facebook](#)

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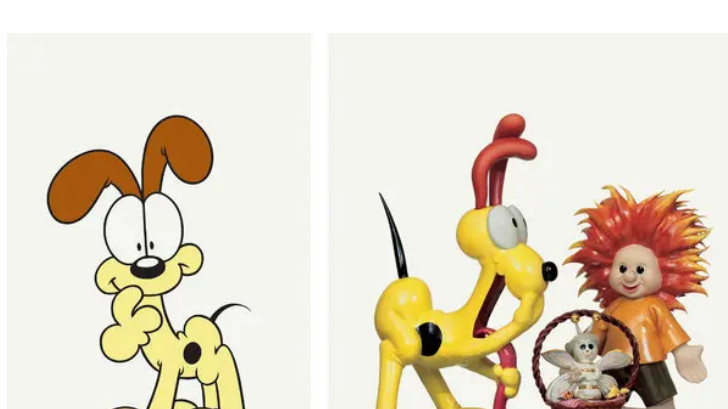
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